

2006 Weather Summary

January 2006 was the warmest January in over 100 years for Minnesota. The average statewide temperature was an incredible 17 degrees above normal. January snowfall was light; only areas along the Canadian border received any appreciable snow. February had some semblance to a "normal" winter. Colder weather returned along with some snow.

Spring was mainly wet across Minnesota, replenishing soil moisture that would be handy later in the season. Precipitation totals for March were above average in the northern and southern thirds of Minnesota, and below normal in the central one third. April 2006 was very warm, and quite wet over the central and south. Far southern Minnesota had one of the wettest Aprils on record. Along the southern tier of counties, monthly rainfall totals topped 6 to 8 inches. Northern Minnesota came up a bit short in April rainfall.

2006 will be remembered for the worst drought to strike Minnesota since 1988. The brunt of the drought was felt across the north and timely rains over the agricultural areas assisted crops greatly. The drought began in mid May. Combined with the extreme heat of late May, this precipitation shortage led to a rapid drying of the landscape. June wasn't unusually warm, but it was the second consecutive month of below average rainfall. A single, intense rainfall event in June did help in isolated areas of southern Minnesota.

The drought intensified in July. Some welcome rains fell on south-central and southeastern Minnesota. No significant widespread rain fell north of a line from Ortonville to Forest Lake. The heat really set July apart. For many Minnesota sites, July 2006 was among the five hottest months on record. This heat elevated evaporation to levels not seen since the 1988 drought. In August, the heat wave broke. It continued to be dry in the north, but very wet in portions of east-central and southeastern Minnesota.

September precipitation totals were near to above average across much of the central and south. Unfortunately, many of the drought-stricken areas of north-central and northeastern Minnesota received below average rainfall for the month. Monthly mean temperatures were generally cooler than normal in most areas of the state. The first frosts of the season for central and southern parts of the state were reported on September 20.

October and November precipitation totals were below average across the state. The exception was southeast Minnesota in November where precipitation totals approached or exceeded average. The unusually dry late autumn weather raised concerns about topsoil moisture in the southern half of the state. October was much cooler than normal across the state, and was the coolest month, relative to normal since May 2005. November and December were warmer than normal. The repeat of yet another non-winter seemed to be coming true with a nearly snow-free December. However there was enough precipitation in the liquid form for December to finish above average. A large winter storm dumped rain, freezing rain and snow on New Year's Eve, putting moisture in the bank for 2007.

